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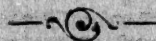
ORIGIN

OF THE

French Canadians,

Read before the British Association

TORONTO, AUGUST, 1897.



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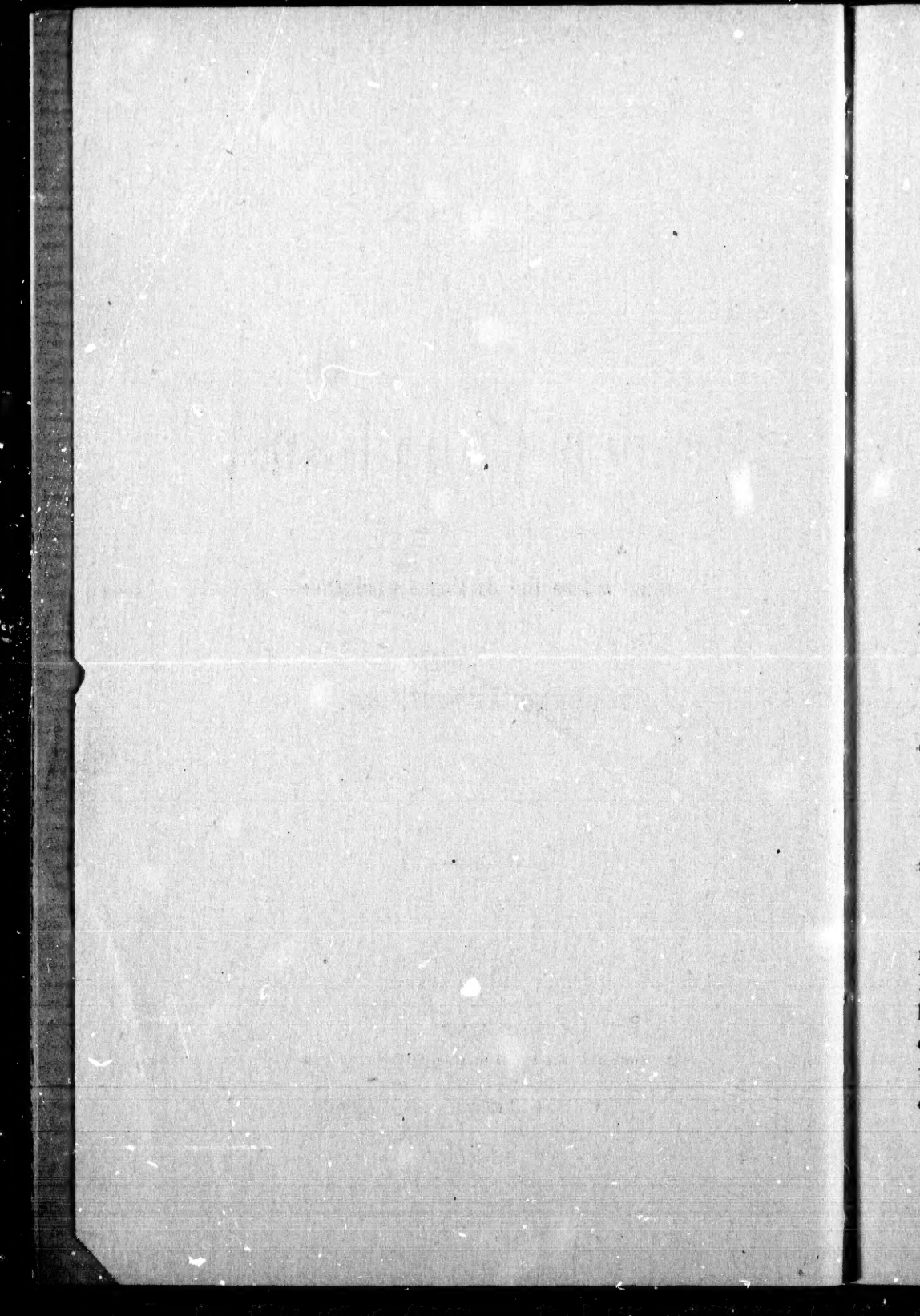
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ORIGIN OF THE FRENCH CANADIANS.

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On seeing this title many persons may express jocularly that the origin of the French Canadian people was France, but you will see presently that there are other things to be considered in this connection.

What part of France did they come from ?

Under what influence ?

From whence did they receive their present characteristics ?

How did they acquire their present form of language ?

Why are not some of the different "patois" spoken in France heard here ?

And what about the half-breeds ?

We intend to explain the formation of a certain number of French people into settlers on the St. Lawrence during the 17th Century and from which has sprung the whole of the present French Canadian population. Nothing will be said of the tradesmen, the functionaries and the clergy who composed the "French" or floating element of

the colony until it disappeared at the conquest.

I. Acadia was peopled by a company of traders between 1636 and 1670 or thereabouts. No one has yet satisfactorily demonstrated where the French of that colony came from, though their dialect would indicate their place of origin to be in the neighbourhood of the mouth of River Loire. They are distinct from the French Canadians in some particulars and not allied by marriages with the settlers of the St. Lawrence. As a matter of fact the two French colonies in question have lived apart from one another although always friendly, but as "Acadians" and "Canadians", for more than two centuries and a half now.

Britany never traded with Canada, except that, from 1535 to 1600, some of the St. Malo navigators used to visit the lower St. Lawrence and barter with the Indians, but there were no European settlers in the whole of that pretended new France. Afterwards the regime of the fur Companies, which extended from 1608 to 1632, was adverse to colonization and we know by Champlain's writings that no resident, no "habitant", tilled the soil during that quarter of a century. The men who were employed at Quebec and elsewhere by the Companies all belonged to Normandy and, after 1632, twelve or fifteen of them married the daughters of the other Normans recently arrived to settle for good. Britany remained in the back ground after, as well as before 1632. This is confirmed by an examination of the parish regis-

ters where seven or eight Bretons only can be found during last period of the 17th Century.

II. The trade of Canada remained in the hands of the Dieppe and Rouen merchants from 1632 until 1663. It consisted solely in fish and fur, especially the latter. Therefore, any man of these localities who wished to go to Canada to settle there was admitted on the strength of the Hundred Partners who were bound to send in people brought up to farming in order to cultivate the soil of the Colony, but who did nothing of the kind except transporting the selfsacrificing emigrants. There is even indication that the transport was not free. The other sea ports of France West and South West having no connection with Canada before 1662, five or six families only came from these ports or the surrounding countries.

The little colony at Montreal, which came from Anjou, subsequent to 1640, differed little in character and origin from the others, except that its members had not been brought up to till the soil and there were no women in their company. A number, therefore, married the daughters of the earlier Norman settlers of Quebec. This helped to preserve the uniformity of the language and general habits of the people. Had the Company of Rouen and Dieppe merchants continued to control the trade of the colony it is certain that the development of the agricultural population, even slow as it had been from the beginning, would have been altogether on Norman lines. But in 1662 another

influence made its presence felt in Canada. A small flow of immigrants, men and women, set in from the country parts around Rochelle and from the Province of Poitou. These were, year by year, as they came out, merged into the older colonists, assuming their habits and forms of speech, already very similar to theirs.

III. When the business of the Hundred Partners collapsed about 1662, Paris and Rochelle came in for a certain share of interest as they were the creditors of the expiring Company, and soon we notice immigrants arriving from the neighbouring country places of those two cities, even as early as 1660.

The settlers (1633-1663) came as a rule individually or in little groups of three or four families related to each other, as many immigrants from various countries do at the present day.

From an examination of family and other archives extending now over thirty years of labour we make the following deductions :

Perche, Normandy, Beauce, Picardy and Anjou (they are here in their order of merit) contributed about 200 families from 1639 to 1663, the period of the Hundred Partners' regime. By natural growth these reached the figure of 2,200 souls in 1663.

In 1662-63 there came about 100 men from Perche and 150 from Poitou, Rochelle and Gascony, with a small number of women. This opens a new phase in the history of our immigration by

introducing Poitou and Rochelle amongst the people of the Northern and Western Provinces of France already counting two generations in the two districts of Quebec and Three Rivers.

IV. After 1665, the city of Paris or rather the small territory encircling it, contributed a good share. The whole of the South and East of France had no connection with Canada at any time. Normandy, Perche, Maine, Anjou, Touraine, Poitou, Saintonge, Angoumois, Guienne and Gascony—on a straight line from North to South—furnished the whole of the families now composing the French Canadian people.

V. From 1667 till 1672, a committee was active in Paris, Rouen, Rochelle and Quebec to recruit men, women and young girls for Canada. This committee succeeded in effecting the immigration into Canada of about 4,000 souls. Half of the girls were from country places in Normandy, and the other half were well educated persons who did not go into the rural districts but married in Quebec, Three Rivers and Montreal.

Since these people were brought to Canada by the organized efforts of a committee we might expect to find some detailed record of their arrival and origin, but as yet no such information is known to exist. We are merely told by contemporary writers of that period how many arrived at such and such date, and the port of embarkation, that is all. Happily the Church registers, notarial deeds, papers of the Courts of Justice, and several

classes of public documents show abundantly the places of origine of those who actually established their families here.

VI. In 1673, the King stopped all immigration, and this was the end of French attempts to colonize Canada. The settlers of course remained as they were and in 1681, the whole population amounted only to 9,700 souls. Double this figure every thirty years and we have the present French population of the Province of Quebec, Ontario and that of the groups established now in the United States.

VII. The bulk of the men who came during 1633-1673, were from rural districts and took land immediately on their arrival here. It is noticeable that a large number of them had, besides, a trade of their own, such as Carpenter, Cooper, Blacksmith, so that a small community of twenty families possessed between themselves all the requirements of that kind that could be useful.

No land was given to those who did not show qualification for agricultural pursuits and those were placed for three years in the hands of an old farmer before the title of any property was assigned to them.

A few discharged soldiers from the Carignan Regiment, in 1670, swelled the number, and as these, together with many of the men from Poitou and Rochelle, came out single, they married the daughters of the previously settled Normans. This accounts for the marked absence at the pre-

sent time throughout the French speaking communities of Canada of any but the Norman accent and forms of speech. All other accents had been overcome by that of the Norman mothers and while it is true that the number of immigrants coming between 1662 and 1673 far exceed those of the earlier period yet those first settlers, through their conservative powers and clannish tenacity, could not be overcome by the influx of numbers, but became, on the contrary, the conquerors, and that, too in a very short space of time.

After 1674, very few immigrants settled on the banks of the St. Lawrence. There were at most not more than thirty or forty a year, which were absorbed in the same manner into the general population. The wars which prevailed from 1684 to 1713 depleted this annual immigration so that the census of 1681 is taken as the basis for all French Canadian genealogical computation even up to our own time.

VIII. In regard to troops disbanded in Canada at various dates much misunderstanding exists. The real facts are as follows : before 1665 no soldiers, therefore no disbandment ; from 1665 to 1673 a few isolated cases ; the regiment of Carignan came to Canada in 1665 and left in 1669 with the exception of one company which eventually was disbanded here ; from 1673 to 1753 the garnisons of Canada consisted as a rule of about 300 men in all, under an Infantry Captain, sometimes called the Major when no longer young.

Besides that "detachment" as it was styled, an addition of six or seven companies was sent in the Colony during the years 1684-1713, on account of the war. From 1753 to 1760 the regiments sent under Dieskau and Montcalm (seven year war) do not seem to have left any number of men in the country. Consequently, the "military element" had very little to do in the formation of our French population.

IX. The date of the arrival of most of the heads of families will never be ascertained accurately. In order to face that difficulty with chances of success, I have resorted to the following plan: prepare an alphabetical list of all the heads of families and afterwards, when consulting the old archives and various sources of information, be careful in comparing your list with any date or other indication you may find. In this manner it turns that a man was married in 1664, in Quebec, was a witness before the Court in 1658, made a deed in 1672, in which he states that "before leaving Alençon in 1652. to come to Canada"..... The date of "1652" and "Alençon" are the very things I want—therefore I erase "1664" and "1658", previously entered and keep the most remote date, with the name of the locality. This process is slow, not very sure, but still it is the best yet found to reach a fair approximate estimate. Finally I hope to publish that tabular statement in a couple of years from now.

X. We have to deal now with La Hontan, a

writer from whom succeeding historians based their assertions as to the questionable character of many of the immigrants that were sent out by the Committee (see V). La Hontan, who came to Canada in 1684, wrote home to his friends describing the country and his experiences. These letters got collected and afterwards were published in book form. In some of these communications he describes the marrying scenes of newly arrived girl immigrants, and other spicy traits which never took place in Canada, and as it is that kind of matter that takes the eye and remains longer in the mind, this odd letter is the one most quoted. Now La Hontan in many of his writings describes with accuracy what occurred under his own eyes and must be believed, but this particular letter is so untruthful that there is little doubt that it was never written by La Hontan, especially as many of the incidents therein referred to indicate the scenes as having occurred in the West Indies and at a time, we know, quite distinct from that of the immigration alluded in paragraph V. Let us remember also that the facts in question happened nearly twenty years before La Hontan's arrival in the country, and that he places them about 1653. He is all wrong.

The statements, too, from other sources, that Canada was peopled by discharged prisoners is quite untrue, for the Supreme Council of Canada exercised the greatest care in the selection of settlers, and the whole details of this case are

found noted in the deliberations and correspondence of this Council. Such items as—"two needle makers having come out with the last party of immigrants are not desirable settlers", are constantly to be found. A small number of persons of doubtful character are noted in the same archives for the next vessel who will return to France. The utmost precautions were taken in this priest ridden colony to eject the objectionable immigrants. These are glaring facts not to be disputed.

XI. On the subject of uniformity of language which is so remarkable amongst the French Canadians we may observe that it is the best language spoken from Rochelle to Paris and Tours and from there to Rouen. Writers of the 17th Century have expressed the opinion that French Canadians could understand a dramatic play as well as the elite of Paris. No wonder to us since we know that theatricals were common occurrences in Canada and that the *Cid* of Corneille was played in Quebec in 1645; the *Tartuffe* of Molière in 1677, and so on during the two following centuries. The taste of music and the love for songs are characteristics of the French Canadian race. The facility with which they learn foreign languages is well known in America, where they speak Indian, Spanish and English as well as their own tongue.

Was there any patois used by the original settlers? Probably some. A word or an expression styled "patois" in the French language is one

that has no place in the authorized dictionary of the race. We have none of that class now. Ancient words, though, are often employed, even by the educated people, but they are only obsolete ; they belong to the dictionary of the 17th century and, therefore, rank as correct terms. In fact, they add to the picturesque of the language and duplicate the ressources of the tongue.

As a rule, the women that came from France could read, and a large number of them knew how to write. That accounts for the schools intended solely for girls which were established so early as 1639, whilst the boys only got theirs a long time afterwards, and not too regularly either. The slang, the patois, must have disappeared under the above influences, coupled with that of the clergy, at the first generation.

XII. There now remains to be considered only the question of the half-breeds, with regard to which there need be little doubt for the civil as well as the religious authorities were strongly opposed to inter-marriages with the Indians. Then, too, there exists at the present day such a complete record of the genealogy of each family, showing clearly that rarely did such marriage take place. Of course those who removed to the North West are not taken into account when speaking of mixed marriages, for far from forming part of the Canadian population they were altogether lost to it. Indian half-breeds of all periods are

looked upon as distinct in race from the white population.

In this brief glance at the origin of the French Canadian, nothing has been said of Scotch, English and Irish elements which have been in many cases since about one century absorbed by the original Norman stock and have become part of the race.

The conclusion which may be arrived at from this argument is that the French Canadian type is Norman, whether its origin be pure Norman, mixed Normand, Gascon or French-English.

BENJAMIN SULTE, F. R. S. C.

Author of *Histoire des Canadiens-Français*, eight vols. 4 to, of 160 pages each, 1882; *Les Canadiens-Français depuis trois Siècles*, a sequel of the former, to be published in 1898-1900, in three vols. 4 to.

OTTAWA, July 1897.

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